

About the Show

Modesto Symphony Orchestra Association

Gershwin's An American in Paris

Friday, February 9, 2024, 7:30 pm

Saturday, February 10, 2024, 7:30 pm

Gallo Center for the Arts, Mary Stuart Rogers Theater

Nicholas Hersh, *conductor*

Program

William L. Dawson (1899-1990)

Negro Folk Symphony (1934)

- I. The Bond of Africa
- II. Hope In the Night
- III. O, Le' Me Shine, Shine Like a Morning Star!

INTERMISSION

Lili Boulanger (1893-1918)

D'un Matin de Printemps (1918)

Featuring a special video presentation by Visit Modesto

George Gershwin (1898-1937)

An American in Paris (1928)

Roster

Orchestra Roster

Nicholas Hersh, conductor

Violin 1

Ilana Blumberg, *concertmaster*

Dagenais Smiley, *associate concertmaster*



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Aya Kiyonaga, *assistant concertmaster*
Joseph Galamba
Xander Abbe
Kirstan Hilton
Mark Neyshloss
Milka Krалеva-Castro
Calvin Lewis
Alex Gavrilidis-Petrin

Violin 2

Myriam Cottin-Rack, *principal*
Darren Sagawa, *assistant principal*
Sarah Elert
Paul Kim
Juan Carlos-Guitierrez
Donald Grishaw
Donna Harrison
Gabrielle Wunsch
Baker Peeples

Viola

Patricia Whaley, *principal*
Kathryn Juneau, *assistant principal*
Pauline Metsger
James Een
Valerie Tisdell
Anne Martin
Jacob Hansen-Joseph
Lisa Ponton

Cello

Trevor Handy, *principal*
Jonathan Flaksman, *assistant principal*
Dina Weinschelbaum
Daniel Davies
Hannah Harrington
Farley Pearce
Kyle Stachnik
Janet Witharm

Bass

Raymond Vargas, *principal*
Sukyung Chun, *assistant principal*
Alden Cohen
Sukyung Chun



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Kody Thiessen
Zachary Iscoff

Flute

Carmen Lemoine, *principal*
Debra Dix
Gail Edwards

Piccolo

Gail Edwards

Oboe

Sarah Beck, *principal*
Anqi Zhou

English Horn

Cat Cantrell

Clarinet

Robert Patterson, *principal*
Victor Matinez Jara
Michael Corner, *E-flat clarinet*
Bence Bubreg, *bass clarinet*

Bassoon

Jeff Robinson, *principal*
Carolyn Lockhart
Christopher Chung, *contra bassoon*

Alto Saxophone

Kevin Stewart, *principal*
Isaac Lopez

Tenor Saxophone

Ricardo Martinez

Baritone Saxophone

Isaac Lopez

French Horn



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SYMPHONY
ORCHESTRA
MUSIC DIRECTOR
—WILLIAMS PRITCHARD—

Melia Badalian, *principal*
Thea Humphries, *assistant principal*

Adam Wolf
William Harrington

Trumpet

John King, *principal*
William Harvey
Owen Miyoshi

Trombone

Bruce Chrisp, *principal*
Don Benham
Todd Eames

Tuba

Forrest Byram, *Principal*

Timpani

John Weeks, *principal*

Percussion

Joseph Runnels, *principal*
Michael Downing
Kumiko Ito

Piano/Celeste

John Hillenbrandt

Roster as of 1/31/2024

Artist Biographies



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Nicholas Hersh

Conductor

American conductor Nicholas Hersh has earned critical acclaim for his innovative programming and natural ability to connect with musicians and audiences alike.

In the 2023-24 season, Hersh returns to the National, Houston, Baltimore, Colorado, and New Jersey Symphonies, while making debuts with the Springfield Symphony and Wintergreen Festival. Recent include engagements with the Detroit, Grand Rapids, New World, North Carolina, Phoenix, Portland (ME), Richmond, Tucson, Utah, and Winston-Salem symphony orchestras, Louisiana and Rochester Philharmonics, and the Florida and Sarasota Orchestras.

Over a remarkable tenure as Associate Conductor of the Baltimore Symphony Orchestra, Hersh created the BSO Pulse series, through which he brought together indie bands and orchestral musicians in unique collaborations; he led the BSO in several subscription weeks, and concerts in and around Baltimore; and he directed the BSO's educational and family programming, including the celebrated Academy for adult amateur musicians. Hersh also maintains a close relationship with the National Symphony Orchestra, leading concerts throughout Washington, D.C. He stepped in to replace an indisposed Yan Pascal Tortelier, on subscription, to great acclaim.

Hersh is frequently in demand as an arranger and orchestrator, with commissions from orchestras around the globe for adaptations of everything from classical solo and chamber music to popular songs. His orchestration of Beethoven's Cello Sonata Op. 69 was premiered by the Philharmonie Zuidnederland in January 2022, while his symphonic arrangement of Queen's [Bohemian Rhapsody](#) continues to see worldwide success as a viral YouTube hit. He also serves as arranger and editor for the James P. Johnson Orchestra Edition.

Hersh grew up in Evanston, Illinois and started his musical training as a cellist. He earned a Bachelor's Degree in Music from Stanford University and a Master's Degree in Conducting from the Indiana University Jacobs School of Music. Hersh is

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also a two-time recipient of the Solti Foundation Career Assistance Award. Nicholas lives in Philadelphia with his wife Caitlin and their two cats, and in his free time enjoys baking (and eating) sourdough bread.

Program Notes

Negro Folk Symphony

William Dawson

William Dawson

Negro Folk Symphony

Composer: born September 26, 1899, Anniston, AL; died May 2, 1990, Montgomery, AL

Composed: 1934, *rev.* 1952

Premiere: Leopold Stokowski led the Philadelphia Orchestra on November 20, 1934, at Carnegie Hall in New York City

Duration: 30 minutes

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 3 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, adawura (Ghanaian bell), African clave, bass drum, chimes, cymbals, gong, snare drum, tenor drum, xylophone, harp, and strings

“I’ve not tried to imitate Beethoven or Brahms, Franck or Ravel – but to be just myself, a Negro,” William Dawson remarked in a 1932 interview. “To me, the finest compliment that could be paid my symphony when it has its premiere is that it unmistakably is not the work of a white man. I want the audience to say: ‘Only a Negro could have written that.’”

Two years later, Leopold Stokowski led the New York Philharmonic in the premiere of Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony*. Critics and audiences alike hailed it as a masterpiece. One reviewer declared it “the most distinctive and promising American symphonic proclamation which has so far been achieved,” and another enthused, “the immediate success of the symphony [did not] give rise to doubts as to its enduring qualities. One is eager to hear it again and yet again.” Given this overwhelmingly positive reception, Dawson’s *Negro Folk*



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Symphony, which at the time he thought of as the first of several future symphonies, should have been heard “again and yet again.” But it was not. Despite Stokowski’s advocacy for Dawson and the *Negro Folk Symphony*, and despite the stellar reviews it received at its premiere, within a few years both the music and its composer had faded into relative obscurity. Dawson never composed another symphony, although he did continue writing and arranging music – primarily spirituals, which he preferred to call “Negro folk songs” – for the rest of his long career.

In the current climate of racial reckoning, Dawson’s *Negro Folk Symphony* is enjoying a long-overdue revival, as is the music of other Black classical composers such as Florence Price, William Grant Still, Nathaniel Dett, and many others.

Dawson wrote that his symphony was “symbolic of the link uniting Africa and her rich heritage with her descendants in America,” and gave each of its three movements a descriptive title. Dawson explained in his own program note: “The themes are taken from what are popularly known as Negro Spirituals. In this composition, the composer has employed three themes taken from typical melodies over which he has brooded since childhood, having learned them at his mother’s knee.” Musicologist Gwynne Kuhner Brown observes, “The themes are handled with such virtuosic flexibility of rhythm and timbre that each movement seems to evolve organically,” creating a “persuasive musical bridge between the ‘Negro Folk’ and the ‘Symphony.’”

In “The Bond of Africa,” Dawson opens with a horn solo. The dialogue between the horn and the orchestra echoes the call-and-response format of most spirituals. The horn solo repeats, usually in abbreviated form, several times throughout this movement, and serves as a musical “bond” holding the work together. The central slow movement, “Hope in the Night,” also features a unifying solo. Here an English horn sounds Dawson’s own spiritual-inspired melody, which he described as an “atmosphere of the humdrum life of a people whose bodies were baked by the sun and lashed with the whip for two hundred and fifty years; whose lives were proscribed before they were born.” Underneath the plaintive tune, the orchestra provides a dirge-like accompaniment that builds to an ominous repetition of the solo for tutti orchestra. This episode is offset by an abrupt change of mood, and we hear a lighthearted, up-tempo reworking of the original tune (the “hope” of the movement’s title). These two contrasting interludes alternate throughout the rest of the movement. Towards the end, Dawson reworks the harmony, which has been grounded in minor keys up to this point, and tiptoes towards major tonalities without fully embracing them. Musically, this device works as a

powerful metaphor for the importance and elusive nature of hope to sustain people through traumatic circumstances.

The closing section, “Oh, Le’ Me Shine, Shine Like A Morning Star!” imagines a world in which the hopes of the previous movement are fully realized. Dawson creates this musical utopia through rhythm. The central melody showcases accented off-beat exclamations from various solo instruments and sections throughout, as the rhythms layer increasingly complex parts over one another. Dawson revised this movement in the early 1950s after he encountered the intricate polyrhythms of West African music during a trip to Africa. The interlocking parts and the sounds of African percussion instruments captured Dawson’s ear; when he returned to America, he added these elements. Eventually all these rhythmic strands come together in a final buoyant exclamation.

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The poster features a collage of artistic elements: a golden trumpet, a pink flower, a bird, a small house, and a landscape. The text reads: » GERSHWIN'S « AN American IN Paris

Gershwin's An American in Paris

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D'un matin de printemps (From A Spring Morning)

Lili Boulanger

Lili Boulangerr

D'un matin de printemps (From A Spring Morning)

Composer: born August 21, 1893, Paris; died March 15, 1918, Mézy-sur-Seine

Work composed: 1917-18. Boulanger made arrangements in multiple versions: for violin and piano, string trio, and full orchestra

World premiere: undocumented

Instrumentation: piccolo, 2 flutes, 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 2 bassoons, contrabassoon, 4 horns, 2 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, bass drum, castanets, cymbals, tambourine, tam-tam, timbales, triangle, celeste, harp, and strings

Estimated duration: 5 minutes



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Women composers, like other female creative artists, have to fight battles their male counterparts do not. Even today, a female visual artist, writer, or composer is sometimes evaluated on criteria that have little or nothing to do with her work, and everything to do with her gender, her appearance, or her life circumstances. Lili Boulanger was no exception.

The younger sister of composer and pedagogue Nadia Boulanger, who taught composition to many of the 20th century's most distinguished composers, Lili Boulanger revealed her enormous talent at a very young age. She was a musical prodigy born into a musical family; in 1913, at age 20, she became the first woman to win the coveted Prix de Rome, France's most prestigious composition prize. Boulanger's compositional style, while grounded in the prevailing impressionistic aesthetics associated with Claude Debussy, is nonetheless wholly her own. Her music features rich harmonic colors, hollow chords (open fifths and octaves), ostinato figures, running arpeggios, and static rhythms.

Along with her tremendous musical ability, Boulanger was born with a chronic, debilitating intestinal illness, probably Crohn's disease. Today there are drugs and other therapies to manage this condition, but in Boulanger's time the illness itself had neither name nor cure, and its treatment was likewise little understood. Throughout her short life, Boulanger suffered from acute abdominal pain, bouts of uncontrollable diarrhea, and constant fatigue; all these symptoms naturally impacted her stamina and her ability to write. Contemporary reviews of Boulanger's work always emphasized her physical fragility, often in lieu of a thoughtful assessment of her music.

Despite illness, Boulanger continued composing, even on her deathbed. *D'un matin printemps*, the second half of a diptych that includes its shorter counterpart *D'un soir triste* (From a Sad Evening) are two of the last works she wrote. Both pieces treat the same opening melodic and rhythmic theme in different ways: in *D'un soir triste*, the tempo is slow and the mood elegiac, while the same melodic/rhythmic fragment receives a cheerful, puckish treatment in *D'un matin printemps* that sparkles with effervescence and youthful joy.

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An American in Paris

George Gershwin

George Gershwin

An American in Paris

Composer: born September 26, 1898, Brooklyn, NY; died July 11, 1937, Hollywood, CA

Work composed: March - June 1928, while Gershwin and his siblings were vacationing in Paris

World premiere: Walter Damrosch led the New York Philharmonic on December 13, 1928 in New York.

Instrumentation: 3 flutes (1 doubling piccolo), 2 oboes, English horn, 2 clarinets, bass clarinet, 3 saxophones (alto, tenor, baritone), 2 bassoons, 4 horns, 3 trumpets, 3 trombones, tuba, timpani, bass drum, bells, cymbals, snare drum, taxi horns, tom-toms, triangle, xylophone, celesta, and strings

Estimated duration: 17 minutes

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“My purpose here is to portray the impression of an American visitor in Paris, as he strolls about the city and listens to various street noises and absorbs the French atmosphere,” wrote George Gershwin about his tone poem, *An American in Paris*. “As in my other orchestral compositions, I’ve not endeavored to represent any definite scenes in this music. The rhapsody is programmatic only in a general impressionistic way, so that the individual listener can read into the music such as his imagination pictures for him,” This highly evocative, colorful symphonic music expertly captures the sights and sounds of Paris as its American protagonist wanders through the city streets. To illustrate the American’s journey, Gershwin included several of what he termed “walking themes,” which recur throughout the work. The trumpet sounds the most recognizable of these, the “homesick music,” in a bluesy solo. The “American” section concludes with an up-tempo Charleston played by a pair of trumpets, and the walking themes return. Finally, the orchestra winds up with a glittering exuberant finale as night falls on the City of Light.

An American in Paris marked a breakthrough for Gershwin as a composer, as the first symphonic piece for which he created his own orchestrations. When *Rhapsody in Blue* premiered in 1924, Gershwin was criticized because the *Rhapsody*’s orchestral version was created by Ferde Grofé. Four years after



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MUSIC DIRECTOR: DAVID BRIDGES

Rhapsody's premiere, with *An American In Paris*, Gershwin demonstrated his growing command of orchestral colors, effectively silencing his detractors.

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The MSO would like to thank

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Video Editor: Jon Tillotson, [melodiq agency](http://melodiq.com)

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Program and artists subject to change. E&OE.



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NICOLAS HERSH
—Music Director—



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